

RPG Reload Special Edition – ‘The RPG Reload 3rd Anniversary Special’

[August 17, 2017](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)

Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the regular feature where we sometimes take a moment to check our status screens and admire our stats. While I had originally planned for this week’s installment to continue our dive into the history of action-RPGs, it was brought to my attention that we passed another milestone this week. Our humble little corner of TouchArcade is now officially three years old, so I’d like to dedicate this week’s column to a little navel-gazing in honor of that accomplishment. Put on your mystic caps of self-indulgence, friends, because we’re going on a magic carpet ride of **RPG Reload** history! If you’re here for the action-RPG series, we’ll be returning to that next week.

When I first answered to one of TouchArcade editor-in-chief Eli Hodapp’s calls for new writers, one of things I hoped to bring to the site was a perspective more informed by the Japanese side of the business. Regular readers know that I call Japan my home, and while I was an avid reader of TouchArcade, I felt like a lot of Japanese mobile games were slipping through the cracks. I was lucky enough to get hired in May of 2013 and, being the low writer on the pole, mostly wrote reviews for whatever was left after the senior staff had their pick. Reviews of major RPGs largely fell to the exemplary Eric Ford, with things like gamebooks and Kemco RPGs coming my way.

As Eric’s day job got busier, more and more RPG reviews fell to me. As I hit my first anniversary of working here, Square Enix released *Dragon Quest 8* in English. Up until this point, Square games were typically handled by Eric, but he knew how much I loved the series and let me take on the review. With the *Dragon Quest* series being a lot less famous than *Final Fantasy* in the English

speaking world, many readers had questions, particularly with regards to which games were the best ones for newcomers to try out. When *Dragon Quest 4* released in August of 2014, I decided to pop in on the thread in the forums to try and answer some questions.

DRAGON QUEST IV Now Available on iOS & Android

I wrote a fairly lengthy post explaining the virtues of each of the *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy* games that had been released on iOS. Jared Nelson read that post and thought it was good enough [to post on the front page](#). In a way, you can consider that post to be the prototype for the **RPG Reload**. At the same time, I was replaying the first *Chaos Rings* game and thinking about how I'd like to write about it. Alas, it was an old game by then, and who wants to read about old mobile games? Still, I decided to at least pitch the idea. First, I ran it by Eric, who liked the idea but wasn't sure if it would be approved. Then, I talked to Jared, who thought it was something he would like to read but again wasn't sure if Eli would go for it. Finally, I pitched it to Eli. I was a little surprised at how ready he was to take a chance on the idea.

The initial plan for the **RPG Reload** was to have it posted on either Monday or Thursday of each week. In the middle of the second week of August, I put together a draft for the first column. My thinking was that we would probably have to do some heavy editing and post it the following Monday. With the bulk of the writing work done, I went to sleep that Thursday night. When I woke up the next morning Eli had already posted it, and the response was wild. Ultimately, 80 comments were posted to that article, with many of you dear readers showing enthusiastic support for the idea. If it wasn't a sure thing before that, it quickly became one. Rain, sleet, snow, or holidays, a week hasn't gone by at TouchArcade since without the **Reload** appearing in some form or another.

The nature of the column has changed a bit over the years, however. There are only so many games to write about, and at times the schedule has gotten a little overwhelming for me. I also wanted to use the **Reload** as a way of branching out into broader features. As such, each year has been a little different from the one before. Let's take a look at each of the three years of the **Reload** now.



Year One: Games, Games, and (Almost) Nothing But

of Games Covered: 51 +1 (Classic)

of Covered Games Currently Delisted: 10

of Current 32-Bit Only Games: 17

Specials: Christmas, Year-End Awards

The gimmick in the first year was that I would allow the readers to choose one game each month for me to cover. Initially it was by a majority vote, but I soon switched to a random draw to make things more interesting. As the feature was quite novel, we had a lot of participation from readers in the first couple of months. That settled down after a while, but certain games still bring a lot of people to the comments at times. One comment on the first article, covering *Chaos Rings*, suggested a forum thread where people could talk about the latest game and perhaps play along.

I thought that was a good idea, so on August 18th 2014, I started [the Official RPG Reload Club Thread](#). It is to date one of the most popular threads in the General Games Discussion sub-section of our forums, with nearly 1700 posts and over 650,000 views. I haven't seen it leave the front page of that section in quite some time. The reader participation thing didn't quite work out, mostly due to my keeping the schedule a secret along with the relatively speedy pace I was moving at. Still, I filed the idea to try and do something with it later, and I was fortunately able to make something of it in the long run.

As I was spending my holidays in 2014 back home in Canada, I wanted to come up with a way to make sure the **RPG Reload** would still appear while not requiring me to dedicate quite as much time to the effort. I also had another project I wanted to get cooking, but it needed some additional effort. I prepared two **Special Editions**, one for Christmas that looked at my favorite Christmas-related RPGs and another for the New Year where I gave out some RPG-specific awards. It was around that time that I was finally able to get an iPad, opening up several iPad-exclusive games for consideration

for the column.



The New Year tends to bring changes in the **Reload**, and that first year was no different. That was when I changed the rule for the **Reader's Choice** to a randomly-selected game from the nominations. It was also when Eric Ford and I were able to launch the **RPG Reload Podcast**. [The first episode](#) covered *Final Fantasy Tactics*. It was a little awkward at first, but I'm proud of what we were able to do with it over the course of its 20 monthly episodes. The first few episodes were just me and Eric. Our first "third chair" was reader Zack Kline, who joined our discussions in the 4th and 18th episodes. After that, Andy Fretz was almost always on hand as our third. Arguably the greatest ever podcast dedicated to retro iOS RPGs, at least in my opinion.

Also of note this year is the first appearance of the **Classic Reload**. It squeaked in just before the end of the year, in late July. The first game covered in that spin-off feature was *Spider – The Secret of Bryce Manor*. It came about similarly to the **RPG Reload**. I was playing *Spider* in preparation for its sequel and really wanted to write about it. Eli is a big fan of that game and was more than happy to greenlight the idea. While I wanted to do it monthly without disrupting the **RPG Reload** schedule, it simply proved to be too much on the plate at once.

Looking back at the first year, I'm sad to see that more than half of the games I covered are either already gone or due to soon be phased out due to a lack of 64-bit support. The **RPG Reload** began as a way of showing appreciation for older games and perhaps a little curation. It seems we have to add preservation through written record to that list of goals. The year ended off on a high note, at least, with Square's *The World Ends With You* finally returning to the App Store after a roller coaster of drama.



Year Two: Shaun's Time-Saving Projects Never Save Time

of Games Covered: 38 +1 (Classic)

of Covered Games Currently Delisted: 6

of Current 32-Bit Only Games: 14

Specials: Christmas, Year-End Awards, The History of Handheld RPGs

By the time the first anniversary came, readers were largely out of ideas for games to cover. I retired the **Reader's Choice** articles and decided to put something new in their place. The idea was that with one less game to play each month, I would have a little more time for myself. Unfortunately,

whenever I try to do something to give myself more time, I almost always seem to end up with less of it. Such was the case with [RPG Reload Presents – The History of Handheld RPGs](#).

Initially planned as a monthly 12-part series covering some of the highlights of handheld RPGs, I ended up being a lot more thorough. Taken together, it is basically a book all on its own. I hope to flesh it out a little bit one day and make an actual book of it, but you wouldn't believe how much time and effort that would involve, friends. If I ever get a chance to breath, it's first on my list though. I'm honestly pretty proud of that series. It didn't exactly rack up the clicks, but those who liked it, liked it a lot. That's usually good enough for me, and luckily, good enough for Eli and Jared as well.

Looking at the numbers for the **RPG Reload Files** from this year is a little depressing. Again, more than half of the games featured will no longer be with us once iOS 11 hits. Many of them have not been updated in a half-decade or longer, and while their publishers are still around, the developers have long since moved on. These games survived multiple iOS version updates, but they won't be able to stand against the 64-bit reaper, I'm afraid.



Year Three: Expanding the Reload

of Games Covered: 14 +13 (Classic)

of Covered Games Currently Delisted: 2

of Current 32-Bit Only Games: 8

Specials: Christmas, Year-End Awards, Developer Spotlight, Play-Along, Glossary

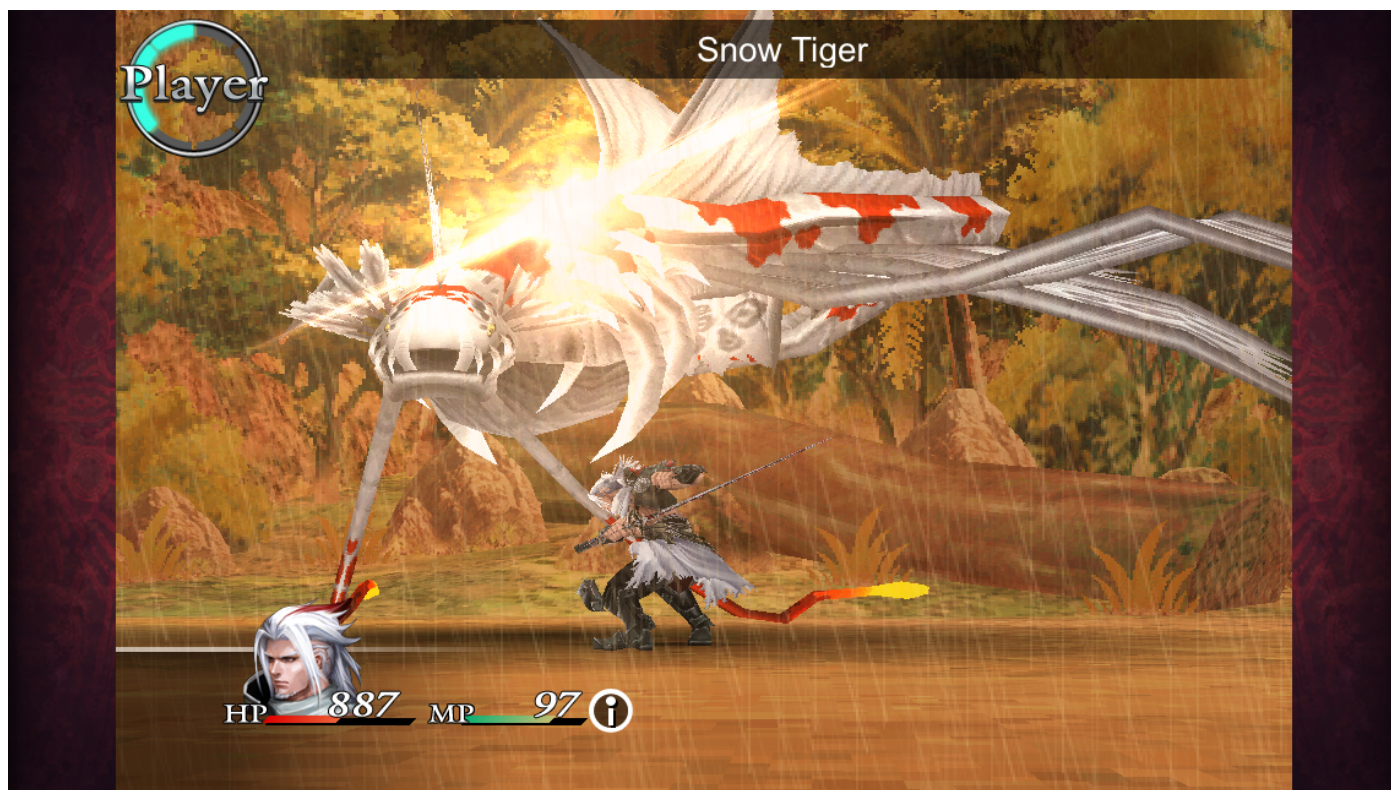
This third year of the **Reload** has seen the column grow well beyond its original aim. With many of the best games already covered and a lot of uncertainty in the air about future compatibility, I pulled back on the regular **RPG Reload Files** at the end of 2016. I've done a few more since, but they're fairly rare now. The **Classic Reload** got onto a regular monthly schedule, and now that we've worked our way through a year's worth of the obvious choices, we can start looking at some quirkier things.

The biggest success this year, in my opinion, has been the **RPG Reload Play-Along**. The idea of playing along with readers was something I had always wanted to do, and we were finally able to make it a reality. The

interest dropped off a bit recently, but I suspect that's as much to do with summer vacations as anything else. I'll definitely be continuing these **Play-Alongs** for the foreseeable future.

I'm also really proud of the **Developer Spotlight** interviews. I had wanted to do more of them, but they are very time-consuming and I suddenly got quite busy a few months back. Still, the ones that were posted are pretty fun reads. Transcribing live audio into words gives them a feeling of a real conversation that doesn't always work with the standard emailed interviews. Thanks again to the developers who agreed to give up their time to do those with me.

This year also saw the start of the **RPG Reload Glossary**, which is really just an excuse for me to wax on about more specific elements of RPG history and so on. It started with a look at social RPGs before moving into TRPGs and now action-RPGs. These will likely continue until I've exhausted interesting topics.



The Future: Year Four and Beyond

As you can see from the numbers, the very concept of the **Reload** is seriously threatened by the ceasing of support for 32-bit apps. It's going to take a little time to see what the total fallout of this looks like. Until then, we'll mostly be continuing on as we have been. Monthly **Classic Reloads**, regular **Glossary** articles, and monthly **Play-Alongs**, with the occasional **RPG Reload File** in there to mix things up. I sincerely hope this feature will survive so many classic games being unceremoniously dropped at once, but I can't make any promises. We won't go down without a fight, at least.

That might be a grim way to close things, but let's not be too down about it. We've had three great years here in the **Reload**, and that's all thanks to the support of you, dear friends. A gentle reminder that the **Reload** is almost entirely funded courtesy of [the TouchArcade Patreon](#). If you like what I'm doing here, subscribing is a really great way to show your appreciation. With any luck, we'll be sharing adventures for many more years to come. I hope you enjoyed this bit of reflection on this anniversary, and I'll be back next week to continue our look at action-RPGs. Thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload: *The History of Action-RPGs, Part 4*